

Message Text

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63

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3448

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 1717

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CS

SUBJECT: THE GREAT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM DEBATE--AGAIN

REF: SAN JOSE 1482

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: EX-PRESIDENT FIGUERES DOES NOT NOW HAVE THE VOTES TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT THE RE-ELECTION OF EX-PRESIDENTS. HOWEVER, HIS SUPPORTERS HAVE LAUNCHED A GRASS ROOTS CAMPAIGN TO PUT PRESSURE ON ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES TO SUPPORT REFORM. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE CALL OF EX-PRESIDENT FIGUERES TO CHANGE CONSTITUTION TO PERMIT EX-PRESIDENTS TO RUN AGAIN (SAN JOSE 1482), COUNTRY HAS BEEN WAIST DEEP IN POLITICAL SPECULATION. THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER FIGUERES WILL HAVE THE VOTES IN THE ASSEMBLY FOR THE CHANGE; PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COUNTINGS (INCLUDING FIGUERES' OWN) ARE THAT HE DOES NOT. LA NACION'S APRIL 1 POLL (THE PAPER INTERVIEWED 53 OF 57 DEPUTIES) IS AS GOOD AS ANY; CONFIDENTIAL

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34 DEPUTIES WERE SOLIDLY AGAINST, 5 ARE FOR, AND

14 WERE DOUBTFUL.

3. HEAD COUNTING, HOWEVER, IS ONLY ONE PART OF THE FIGUERES FACTION'S AND NOT THE MOST IMMEDIATE. THE MEDIA ARE SPOUTING--AND FIGUERES HAS CONFIRMED IT TO THE EMBASSY PRIVATELY--THAT THE NAME OF THE GAME IS NOW TO BUILD POPULAR SUPPORT IN RANK AND FILE OF THE PLN AND IN THE PUBLIC BROADLY TO PRESSURE THE PARTY MACHINERY AND THE DEPUTIES TO SUPPORT REFORM. SIGNATURES ARE BEING COLLECTED (ACCORDING TO FIGUERES CONTROLLED MEDIA "BY THE THOUSANDS"). FIGUERES' OFFICE ON APRIL 3 RELEASED A STATEMENT SAYING THAT VARIOUS GROUPS HAVE BEEN PRESSURING HIM AND THAT FIGUERES "HAS DECIDED THAT HE SHOULD NOT ASSUME THE HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY OF DENYING HIS SERVICE TO THE PARTY AND THE COUNTRY". IT IS NOW UP TO THE ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES, THE STATEMENT CONCLUDES. MEANWHILE, POLITICAL OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT THE PLN DEPUTIES WHO OPPOSE REFORM WILL BE BROUGHT UNDER TREMENDOUS PRESSURE BY FIGUERES SUPPORTERS IN THE WEEKS AHEAD.

4. THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO BE TEMPTED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF FIELDING THEIR BEST VOTE-GETTER OF RECENT TIMES--EX-PRESIDENT TREJOS--FOR THE 1978 ELECTIONS. ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING STRATEGIES THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT FORCES ARE THINKING ABOUT IS TO SUPPORT REFORM DURING THE 1976 SESSION. THUS, THE REASONING GOES, LIBERATION WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SELECT A CANDIDATE WITH ANY CONFIDENCE FOR ONE YEAR, AND WILL GO INTO THE CAMPAIGN IN MID-1977 WITH INTERNAL PARTY WOUNDS BETWEEN PRO- AND ANTI-FIGUERES GROUPS IN THE PARTY STILL FRESH. MANY IN THE OPPOSITION, HOWEVER, STILL OPPOSE GIVING FIGUERES THE CHANCE TO RUN AGAIN--EVEN AGAINST TREJOS.

5. FIGUERES SEEMS TO BE THRIVING ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF IT ALL. HEALTHWISE, HE IS LOOKING VERY WELL-- BUT LIKE A MAN IN HIS LATE 60S. LATELY HE IS HITTING THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL IN THE NAME OF PARTY UNITY WITH HIS CHIEF INTERNAL RIVAL LUIS ALBERTO MONGE; EACH HAS MADE AN EFFORT TO DOWNPLAY THEIR DIFFERENCES. DON PEPE HAS STATED PRIVATELY TO THE EMBASSY THAT HE HAS NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT HIS POSITION IN THE PARTY; ODUBER AND MONGE

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CONTROL THE PARTY MACHINERY, HE ADMITS. HE ALSO DISCLAIMS HE IS THAT MUCH INTERESTED IN THE PRESIDENCY (HE TALKS ABOUT A FUTURE ROLE AS SOME KIND OF AN ECONOMIC OR DEVELOPMENT SUPER MINISTER); HOWEVER, IN HIS PRIVATE RUNDOWN OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF ALL THE CANDIDATES HE EXPRESSES SOME MISGIVINGS ABOUT ALL OF THEM. FINALLY, FIGUERES DENIES VEHEMENTLY THAT IF HE DOES NOT GET HIS WAY HE WILL FORM A NEW PARTY.

6. COMMENT: THE ONLY THING ABOUT WHICH ALL POLITICAL
OBSERVERS AGREE LATELY IS THAT THE NEXT TWO-THREE MONTH
PERIOD WILL BE KEY IN DECIDING THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION--
AND THE ROLE OF JOSE FIGUERES IN THE 1978 CAMPAIGN.
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